

Healthy Kids put fresh spin on veggies and fruit



By Brock Weir

They say you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs ? but what if you can't even get your kid to make the first crack? That's now a distant memory for the local kids and parents who did some bonding in the kitchen this month with the Healthy Kids Community Challenge.

About a dozen parents, and their kids, made good use of the new industrial kitchen at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, part of the Centre's Youth Space for Healthy Family Fun in the Kitchen, a program coordinated by the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, operated by Windfall Ecology Centre, and the Town of Aurora.

The free three-session program was designed to give an introduction to healthy cooking, enjoyed by kids and parents together, facilitated by a trained instructor providing guidance, recipes and all supplies.

"We signed up so the kids could learn cooking and they can learn how to help out at home in the kitchen and stuff like that," said Royden D'Souza, finishing up some oatmeal prepared, in part, by his 11-year-old son Liam, a student at Lester B. Pearson Public School. "There is also the nutritional value of the food ? there are a lot of healthy recipes that are easy to prepare. We have seen a lot of value [from the program] and the changes in these guys' behaviour at home.

"My daughter would never eat eggs. After the second class, she came back and said, "I want to eat eggs! I want to have scrambled eggs and I want to make them myself!" She made them herself and ate them. They got a lot of confidence in handling kitchen items, cooking and stuff like that. At home, we get them to do stuff, but it is more us wanting them to do it rather than the initiative coming from them."

Royden's wife, Dale D'Souza, left the program with the same impression.

"It builds so much confidence in the children because they actually got to handle the food, handle knives and stand at the stove, and do things like that. It builds so much self-confidence being able to cook in a comfortable, safe environment, as well as having friends around who are doing the same thing."

And, in the end, that is exactly what the Healthy Kids Community Challenge is shooting for as they lay the groundwork for their new focus on fruits and vegetables, which is set to launch this spring.

This past fall, the Healthy Kids Community Challenge launched the latest phase of their education campaign, "Water Does Wonders," which has produced a series of Town-wide initiatives to get kids to put down the pop and give water another try. This spring, Water Does Wonders will give way to Choose To Boost Veggies and Fruit, an initiative aimed at giving kids hands-on experience not only learning where their food comes from, but how to grow it ourselves.

"With Healthy Kids, our goal is to bring different, healthy initiatives, whether it is through physical activity or healthy nutrition and healthy behaviours to the kids in Aurora," says Kathleen Ko, local program coordinator for the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. "We do a lot of work with schools, but this was a good opportunity to do something more within the community and having the kids

and the parents cooking together is a great incentive to motivate each other. The parents are having fun spending time with their kids and vice versa, and the kids get an opportunity to have fun with their parents outside of the home.

?Cooking and learning cooking skills will hopefully foster their knowledge of food so kids will be interested in preparing foods and the more they are interested in preparing the more they will be interested in eating healthy foods and consuming fruits and veggies.?
These adventures in cooking were the first event working with the Town and the Healthy Kids Community Challenge is hoping to continue the program in the spring or summer when they shine their light on fruits and veggies.

?It is going to be nutrition-focused and encourage kids to have more veggies and fruit with all the meals of the day,? says Ms. Ko.

?With our next theme being nutrition, the cooking class was a great way for us to see if this is something we can do more of. We're hoping to do lots more events and programs in schools.

?Cooking is one of them and we want to introduce more initiatives on where their food comes from, whether that be gardening, urban agriculture, workshops with the kids and getting them excited about where their food comes from. Having them experience growing it themselves can inspire and energize them to look at food in different ways.?